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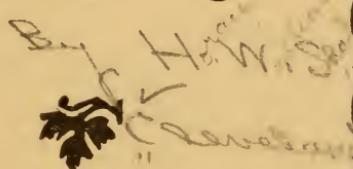


20 Social Life and Literature
Fifty Years Ago



Social Life
and
Literature

Fifty Years Ago



41



Boston
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In publishing this monograph anonymously, I have no wish to seek concealment, but simply to let my statements rest on their own merits.

Its publication has been urged by friends who sympathized with its sentiments, and in whose judgment I have confidence.

I may say I have spoken of the living in no severer terms than they have applied to those who can no longer reply, but whose memory lives too vividly in my affections to suffer me to remain silent.

The Author.



Contents.

	PAGE
I. REASONS FOR PRESENTING THESE THOUGHTS	9
II. LATITUDE IN RELIGIOUS BELIEF.—NEWSPAPERS.—MODERN PROGRESS IN SWINDLING	15
III. ATHLETICS.—ASPECT OF CULTURE BEWAILED.—WE HAD A FEW AUTHORS THEN	25
IV. THE FIVE OF CLUBS.—WASHINGTON IRVING.—LATTER-DAY WRITERS	37
V. CHARLES DICKENS AND WASHINGTON IRVING.—GEORGE TICKNOR AND GEORGE S. HILLARD	51
VI. PROFESSOR FELTON.—THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RESPONDING	67
VII. SALEM.—NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.—SALEM MEN	79





I.

Reasons for Presenting these Thoughts.





I.

Reasons for Presenting these Thoughts.

IF the writers of fiction who cater to modern tastes are correct in their comments upon the authors who were popular half a century ago, or upon the prevailing social and literary culture of that period, my position in venturing to appear in public will be not unlike that of Rip Van Winkle on his reappearance after his long sleep, during which the Revolution had taken place; and an apology may be required for my antiquated style of thought and speech.

If such be the case, I can only plead in palliation of my offence that I have

not yet acquired such familiarity with the popular literature of to-day as to appreciate its superiority of style and composition, or accept it as a substitute for that on which my early tastes were formed.

I venture also to hope that those who are disposed to be censorious will reflect that the full adolescence of human intellect may not even yet have been reached. Fifty years seems a very long period to look upon in advance, but it will seem very short when viewed in the retrospect; and there is a bare possibility that names which now flash upon us from every book-stall may then hold no higher place in the world's estimation than they now assign to the writers who entertained us at that day.

However incredible it may appear to modern writers, and perhaps to many readers of the present generation, it is

nevertheless strictly true that no story-teller now upon the stage is watched or listened to with a degree of interest at all to be compared with that we then bestowed upon Scott, Irving, Dickens, or Thackeray, to say nothing of Bulwer, D'Israeli, Cooper, Herman Melville, and the Brontës.

If my statement elicits the response that the standard of literary taste and the general tone of society at that day were so far inferior to the present that they were satisfied with viands which would now be thought insipid, I am forced to admit that many sources of entertainment that are now in vogue were then unthought of, and some of them would have been regarded as at least of questionable character. The stage then offered us no such attractions as "Pinafore" and the "Pirates of Penzance." We had to content

ourselves as best we might with such operas as "La Sonnambula," "Il Trovatore," or "Massaniello;" with old comedies like the "School for Scandal," or "She Stoops to Conquer;" to enjoy heartily the pantomimes of the Ravel family, or try to obtain a conception of Shakespeare's characters through the interpretations of the Kembles, father and daughter, of Kean, M'ready, and the elder Booth.





II.

• Latitude in Religious Belief. —
Newspapers. — Modern Pro-
gress in Swindling.





II.

Latitude in Religious Belief.

IT is certainly an evidence of intellectual advance that much greater latitude than formerly is now allowed in the matter of religious belief, and the bitterness of sectarianism is not only sensibly diminished, but is generally regarded as evidence of a very narrow mind.

But on the other hand, no such burlesques of religion would then have been tolerated as the “Salvation Armies” and sensational preachers, whose extravagances can excite no feeling but disgust in the mind of any one who has the faintest conception of truly devout feeling. The

plea of mere curiosity is no excuse for those who give the sanction of their presence at such gatherings, and thus afford moral and material aid to a disgraceful exhibition.

The mysteries of Spiritualism had made some show a century or two before, under the name of witchcraft, but, after being pretty effectually silenced at Salem, had fallen into such disrepute that the belief in it had come to be regarded as sufficient evidence of gross ignorance, until it was revived and upheld by modern culture.

“Metaphysical doctors” had not then entered the field of medical practice, though the theory of mind-cure is as old as Marcus Aurelius, who puts it as follows: “Do not suppose you are hurt, and your complaint ceases. Cease your complaint, and

you are not hurt." And Hamlet sets it forth in a single pithy sentence when he tells Rosencrantz, "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."

• Newspapers.

Newspaper literature now comprises a world of interest, which was undreamt of half a century ago. We had then no such appreciation of the prize-ring and its heroes as has since been developed, and in fact regarded the whole thing as one of the disgusting barbarisms that we had outgrown.

We had so little conception of the refinement of modern culture that a newspaper reporter who presumed to pry into domestic affairs, for the purpose of laying them before the public, would have been ignominiously kicked

from the door. Lists of wedding presents were not then supposed to concern the general public, and back-handed advertisements under the guise of testimonial gifts and speeches, at the instance and cost of the recipient, or published portraits on similar terms, were unknown, and would have sufficed to damn the man who made use of them. Canada had not then acquired its present reputation as a sanitarium for bankers afflicted with a plethora of other people's money, — a disease which had not then attained such alarming prevalence as at present. Indeed, the novelties in the line of sensational crime that have been introduced since that day are altogether beyond enumeration. It seems to me but yesterday that, not New England alone, but the whole country, was thrilled with hor-

ror at the murder of old Mr. White in his bed in Salem; and the trial of the murderers, with Daniel Webster as prosecuting attorney, was read from Maine to New Orleans. But who cares for such commonplace entertainments now? We can hardly take up a paper that does not contain accounts of murders in such variety of style as plainly to evince our great advance in the arts of design, though it must be confessed that no murder of recent days has surpassed that old-time Salem tragedy in the element of dramatic horror which environed its inception, perpetration, and final *dénouement*.

Modern Progress in Swindling.

Among the evidences of modern progress may be cited the varied

forms of swindling advertisements, prominent among which is that of deluding the newspaper reader into the perusal of an item bearing the caption, and opening with a reference to some topic of general and vital interest, which proves to be only a decoy to lure him on to a point at which an advertisement may be sprung upon him of some nostrum which has already been thrust in his face till its very name is enough to give him a sense of nausea.

The trick has no intrinsic importance, and intelligent readers are of course rarely caught by it, but the great mass of the simpler sort are ready to applaud the ingenuity it displays, and fail to perceive that those who can stoop to its perpetration are no whit better than sneak thieves, and would feel no hesitation

at picking a pocket, if safe from detection.

They are sticklers for the observance of external forms,—are for the most part of sanctimonious habit, and rigid censors of those who neglect the ceremonials of worship, and they constitute the rotten timber in the social fabric, the dread of whose presence tends to destroy confidence in the stability and permanence of our institutions.

It must be confessed, however, that the necessity of constant watchfulness thus inspired tends to relieve the monotony which was the attendant of old-fashioned honesty.





III.

• Athletics. — Aspect of Culture
Bewailed. — We had a few
Authors then.





III.

Athletics.

BOAT-RACING was not then included in the curriculum of the colleges, and the reports of base-ball matches, which now (perhaps justly) hold quite as prominent a place in the newspapers as the debates in Congress, would not then have been thought worthy the perusal of men of mature years.

It is true that a lack of taste for athletic sports was then regarded as one of the serious deficiencies in our national character, and able writers used to urge their more frequent practice as a means of physical development we could not afford to neglect.

But those advocates would hardly have been satisfied with the modern method of delegating the performance of field sports to a few hired experts in ball-playing, rifle-shooting, and boating, while the great mass of people who attend as spectators require the aid of a street car for a distance of half a mile.

These illustrations, which might be multiplied almost indefinitely, afford such evidence of progress in all that makes life desirable that it is not perhaps surprising that the social aspect of the past should appear "dim and gloomy" to writers who look back upon it from the midday effulgence in which they now stand.

So Aspect of Culture Bewailed.

We have evidence that such is the case in the following passage, in which Mr. Henry James bewails the meagre opportunities for intellectual development which were afforded to Nathaniel Hawthorne :—

“ His culture had been of a simple sort, — there was little of any other sort to be obtained in America in those days ; and though he was doubtless haunted by visions of more suggestive opportunities, we may safely assume that he was not to his own perception the object of compassion that he appears to a critic who judges him after half a century’s civilization has filtered into the dim twilight of that earlier time.

“ If New England was socially a very small place in those days, Salem

was a still smaller one; and if the American tone at large was intensely provincial, that of New England was not greatly helped by having the best of it. I imagine there was no appreciable group of people in New England at that time proposing to itself to *enjoy* life; this was not an undertaking for which any provision had been made, or to which any encouragement was offered. Hawthorne must have vaguely entertained some such design upon destiny, but he must have felt that his success would have to depend wholly upon his own ingenuity. He was poor, he was solitary, and he undertook to devote himself to literature in a community in which the interest in literature was as yet of the smallest."

It is a merciful dispensation of Providence that the people of any

period cannot be sensible of their misfortune in coming upon the stage of life before the advent of the stars whose brilliancy is destined to illuminate succeeding generations. It was my wretched fate to have attained the full vigor of youthful manhood at the period to which Mr. James refers; and not only that, but to have lived in that darkest portion of "the dim twilight of that earlier civilization" called Salem. And it is doubtless owing to the effect of the insipid intellectual food and unwholesome social atmosphere that surrounded me, that my literary taste became so warped and stunted that I am yet unable to appreciate the superiority even of the writings of Mr. James himself to those on which we then had to subsist as best we might.

Not being myself a professional literary *chef*, I should not presume to

offer advice as to the preparation of the dishes that are served up for our entertainment; but when modern cooks begin to set forth the exquisite flavor of the viands they provide by comparison with those that were formerly served, it is surely in order for those who have “sat at meat” in other days, and retain a vivid recollection of the fare then provided, to express an opinion of their comparative merits.

We had a few Authors then.

Scott was then, as we thought, established beyond the possibility of rivalry in the line he had struck out for himself as a novelist. D'Israeli had proved his genius by the production of “Vivian Grey,” which blazed upon the world like a flash of lightning.

Bulwer's novels were eagerly sought, and read with avidity by multitudes in spite of (perhaps in *consequence* of) their bitter denunciation by the rigid moralists, who declared that Paul Clifford was converting all the young men into highwaymen, while the students of Harvard were ordering their coats to be cut by the rules laid down in Pelham.

Then came Currer and Acton Bell, and all the world was talking of "Jane Eyre" with a fervor of interest very far beyond anything that any modern writer of fiction could elicit; and just then Mr. Pickwick walked quietly upon the stage, and the attention of the whole reading world was concentrated upon him and his companions, whose sayings were quoted and paraphrased till one could hardly meet an acquaintance on the street without an

interchange of “Wellerisms.” Dickens easily took the front rank, and held it for years in spite of the absurd display of indignation called forth by his “American Notes” and “Martin Chuzzlewit;” and although the more just estimate which time has enabled us to fix upon the man and his writings has to some extent modified the enthusiasm with which they were at first greeted, it is very certain that no ordinary man could have aroused it, and its foundation is too solid to be shaken by supercilious comparisons with the more refined tastes of the present day.

Thackeray appeared a few years later, and though less theatrical and brilliant than Dickens, and at first greatly misapprehended, his great work “Vanity Fair” arrested the attention of thoughtful men from the

outset, as emanating from a mind of wider and deeper grasp than Dickens's. We really thought we were pretty well provided for, and were quite unconscious that we "had not even proposed to ourselves to *enjoy* life."

Mr. Howells tells us that neither of these writers would attract much attention now, but we were happily ignorant of our deficiency of taste, and even flattered ourselves that we had men among us who were competent judges of writers, and might even pass for scholars. Everett, and Webster, and Choate, and Channing, and Sparks, and Quincy, and Ticknor, and Allston were then in their prime.

In Salem (the smallest of the small in the social scale) we had Bowditch, and Pickering, and Story, and Pierce, and Prescott. We flattered our-

selves at the time that we appreciated them, and they certainly never complained of the lack of congenial society.

Doubtless our perceptions corresponded with the darkness of the social atmosphere through which we were groping our way towards the dawn.





IV.

**The Five of Clubs.—Washington
Irving.—Latter-Day Writers.**





IV.

The Five of Clubs.

READERS of Pierce's "Life of Charles Sumner," or of Samuel W. Longfellow's biography of his brother, the poet, will recall the frequent allusions to the association of young literary men that was known in Boston fifty years ago as "The Five of Clubs." Its members were Henry W. Longfellow, Charles Sumner, C. C. Felton, George S. Hillard, and Henry R. Cleveland.

They were all about the same age, and were training themselves and helping each other for the course in life whose record is now before the world. Sumner had just returned from Eu-

rope, where he had met with perhaps the most brilliant reception ever accorded to so young an American, and was gathering strength for the contest, his achievements in which are now matters of history.

Longfellow and Cleveland had each spent years abroad, enjoying and diligently improving the best advantages of education Europe could afford. That the death of the latter, at the age of thirty-four, cut off as fair a promise of intellectual development and possible literary distinction as has since been attained by the members who survived him, will be certified by leading scholars of to-day who were his pupils.

Felton was then Greek professor at Harvard. He was Cleveland's classmate, and after graduating they were associated as teachers in charge of a

classical school at Geneseo, N. Y. Hillard was then the law partner of Charles Sumner; and up to that time, and for many years later, neither he nor Felton had enjoyed other opportunities of culture than were available in "the dim twilight of intellectual life and taste which was the condition of life in New England fifty years ago."

Longfellow writes to his friend Greene, in Rome, at this time (1839):—

"And now for American literature. Prescott is writing a 'History of the Conquest of Mexico.' Willis's 'A l'Abri' is a collection of letters written from his country-seat on the Susquehanna, and published in the 'Mirror' as 'Letters from under a Bridge;' very racy and beautiful. Hillard has in press a new and beautiful edition

of Spenser, with preface and notes by himself. Felton is busily at work upon a translation of Menzel's 'German Literature.' He is doing it finely. Bulwerism is dying out. Marryatism ditto. Dickens reigns supreme as the popular writer. Bancroft has written a violent article against Goethe in the 'Christian Examiner.' Washington Irving is writing away in the 'Knickerbocker.' A Miss Fuller has published a translation of 'flunkey' Eckermann's 'Conversations with Goethe;' Dr. Bird, a new novel, etc., etc."

To which I may add that Longfellow himself was just bringing out "Hyperion," and I make the above quotation simply as incidental evidence that we had some excuse for believing that at least a germ of literary taste was then in existence.

The intimate affectionate compan-

ionship and interchange of thought and feeling in regard to the literary labors in which these young men were so fully and sympathetically engaged caused no small amount of good-natured chaffing, and led to their being designated as "The Mutual Admiration Society."

In response to this, and in order to set such bantering at defiance, they determined to act upon the hint by organizing as a literary association ; and to avoid the apparent absurdity of a club of only five members, they adopted the title of "The Five of Clubs," which was original and beyond criticism.

Washington Irving.

I was a near relative, and at that time a frequent inmate of the house-

hold, of one of the five. I was several years short of their average age, and had no pretension to the scholarship which would fit me to be their intellectual associate, but was on terms of pleasant friendship with all, and of familiar intimacy with at least three of them. With two of these my acquaintance was continued in the form of affectionate correspondence till their death.

I was fond of reading, and fully appreciated the advantage I enjoyed in the frequent intercourse with men so well able and kindly disposed to advise and direct my tastes, and whose companionship could not fail to exert a salutary and refining influence.

The earliest appreciative experience that I can recall of a keen sense of literary enjoyment was some ten years previous to this date, about 1828,

when, as a schoolboy, I made my first acquaintance with Irving's "Sketch-Book" and "Tales of a Traveller;" and these with his subsequently published tales are among the few books which have stood the test of time, and still retain for me the exquisite flavor, the rich yet delicate seasoning of racy humor and quiet but pithy satire, which commended them to my youthful palate sixty years ago.

Later in life it became a source of gratification and national pride with me to learn that my taste was shared in full by Scott and Dickens, whose works I had then perused with such enjoyment that I placed great confidence in their estimate of literary merit.

In a letter to Henry Brevoort, Scott says: —

"I beg you to accept my best

thanks for the uncommon degree of entertainment which I have received from the most excellently jocose history of New York.

“ I am sensible that, as a stranger to American parties, I must lose much of the concealed satire of the piece ; but looking only at the simple and obvious meaning, I have never read anything so closely resembling the style of Dean Swift as the annals of Diedrich Knickerbocker.

“ I have been employed these few evenings in reading them aloud to Mrs. Scott and two ladies who are our guests, and our sides have been absolutely sore with laughing.

“ I beg you will let me know when Mr. Irving takes pen in hand again, for assuredly I shall expect a very great treat.”

• Latter-Day Writers.

It was perhaps fortunate for Sir Walter that he did not live to experience the mortification he must have felt had he perused the criticism of this same work by a "latter-day" writer who was not born when the above was written.

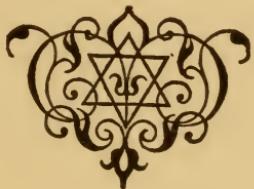
Mr. George Parsons Lathrop, in an article published some years since in "Scribner's Magazine," in which Irving is portrayed throughout as an insipid, milk and water writer, of whom America had no reason to be proud, disposes as follows of the work which Scott was weak enough to enjoy:—

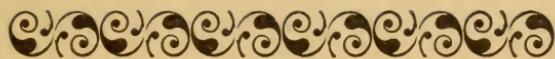
"In his Knickerbocker history he has furbished up the conventional Dutch type with some ingenuity.

And this brings us to his humor. There is a smack of college wit about it, especially in the excess to which he carries pretended derivations of local and personal names. There is always in Irving's writings the mild, sweet radiance of a graceful, uncontaminated spirit, which comes forth here and there in a sort of subdued, gentle smile,— and this is something to be prized. But his humor never develops into the full rich laugh that belongs to Scott and Dickens."

Several years have elapsed since this exposure of our ignorance and mistaken admiration was made public, and I have waited patiently in the hope that he who thus enlightened us would at least give us a sample of something really worth having to console us for our mortification. But

alas for my depraved taste, which persists in rejecting the delicacies he offers us, and recurs with longing to the memory of Irving.





V.

Charles Dickens and Washington
Irving.—George Ticknor and
George S. Hillard.





V.

Charles Dickens and Washington Irving.

AS Mr. Lathrop mentions Dickens in comparison with Irving, it is but fair to hear Dickens's own opinion of our countryman.

An absurd story went the rounds of the papers, a few years since, of the first meeting between Irving and Dickens, in which the latter was said to have conducted himself so offensively that all further intercourse between them was broken off.

It is fortunately easy to refute a slander which cannot be otherwise than painful to any one who cherishes the memory of the two men, with a

grateful sense of the service they have rendered in the promotion of sentiments of charity and kind feelings among fellow-mortals.

The following letter from Dickens to Irving, written before he had thought of visiting the United States, is such a delightful tribute to the genius of our countryman, and so honorable to Dickens himself, that no lover of their writings can fail to enjoy it.

Irving had read and enjoyed Dickens's productions as they appeared, and on perusing the story of little Nell he could no longer repress his desire to testify to the author his interest in the tale and his appreciation of the genius that conceived it.

His letter elicited this hearty response from Dickens:—

“ My DEAR SIR,— There is no man

in the world who could have given me the heartfelt pleasure you have by your kind note of the 13th of last month. There is no living writer, and there are very few among the dead, whose approbation I should feel so proud to earn. And with everything you have written upon my shelves, and in my thoughts, and in my heart of hearts; I may honestly and truly say so. If you could know how earnestly I write this, you would be glad to read it, and I hope you will be, faintly guessing at the warmth of the hand I autographically hold out to you over the broad Atlantic.

“I wish I could find in your welcome letter some hint of an intention to visit England. I should love to go with you, as I have gone, God knows how often, into Little Britain, and East Cheap, and Green Arbor Court,

and Westminster Abbey. I should like to travel with you outside the last of the coaches down to Bracebridge Hall. It would make my heart glad to compare notes with you about that shabby gentleman in the oilcloth coat and red nose who sat in the nine-cornered back parlor of the Mason's Arms. And about Robert Preston and the tallow chandler's widow, whose sitting-room is second nature to me. And about all those delightful places and people that I used to walk about and dream of in the daytime, when a very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy. I have a good deal to say, too, about that dashing Alonzo de Ojeda, that you can't help being fonder of than you ought to be; and much to hear concerning Moorish legend and poor unhappy Boabdil.

“Diedrich Knickerbocker I have

worn to death in my pocket, and yet I should show you his mutilated carcass with a joy past all expression. I have been so accustomed to associate you with my pleasantest and happiest thoughts that I rush at once into full confidence with you, and fall, as it were, naturally and by the very laws of gravity into your arms. I don't know what to say first or what to leave unsaid. Questions come thronging to my pen, as to the lips of people who meet after long hoping to do so, and I am constantly disposed to break off and tell you again how glad I am this moment has arrived.

“ I cannot thank you enough for your cordial and generous praise, or tell what deep and lasting gratification it has given me.

“ I hope to have many letters from you, and to exchange a frequent cor-

respondence. After the first two or three I shall settle down into a connected style, and become gradually rational. You know what the feeling is after having written a letter, and sealed it, and sent it off. I shall picture you reading this and answering it before it has lain one night in the post-office.

“Ten to one, before it reaches New York I shall be writing you again.

“Always your faithful friend,

“CHAS. DICKENS.”

George Ticknor and George S. Hillard.

I call to mind only one instance of criticism which is parallel in its superciliousness to this opinion of Mr. Lathrop, in the face of the established verdict of the best minds of the pre-

vious half century, of whom Scott may be taken as the exponent.

When Hillard's "Life of George Ticknor" was published, it took rank, both at home and abroad, as one of the most instructive and entertaining works of its class. Its interest is chiefly due to the terms of intimacy on which it places the reader with the men and women whose position or intrinsic worth has given them the strongest claim upon the respect of all who honor nobility of character. Probably no American has ever been so cordially received and admitted into the intimate friendship and correspondence of so wide a circle of the men and women whom the world has most delighted to honor, and in this delicious memoir we may feast our souls in familiar intercourse with them through the medium of his letters and

journals. Mr. Ticknor was welcomed by all the best people in every country, making new friends wherever he went, and keeping them through life; finding himself by a sort of natural affinity on a familiar footing with authors, wits, statesmen, crowned heads, and leaders of fashion; being present at a critical moment to hear Talleyrand's deep oracular utterances; receiving Prince Metternich's confidences by the hour together; admitted to Madame De Staël's dying couch; standing in the privileged circle near enough to hear Lady Jersey refusing the Duke of Wellington admittance to "Almack's."

In England the book was declared to be the "richest gift of biographical literature we have ever received from America," and the London "Saturday Review" said of it:—

“One is puzzled to know how a young American should from his first landing in Liverpool to wherever his travels led him come to be on intimate terms with everybody of name throughout civilized Europe, should be passed on from England to France, France to Germany, Germany to Italy, and thence to Spain, everywhere received by the ‘best people.’”

Yet this man, whose companionship and correspondence were eagerly sought by such men and women as I have named, whose house in Boston was the lode-star of attraction for men of the highest culture from every quarter of the globe, and who, beside the fame reflected upon his country by his great work on “Spanish Literature,” is entitled to the gratitude of every American, as being the founder of the free library system of the coun-

try, was served up by the literary correspondent of the leading daily journal of one of our principal cities (a well-known female writer) as one who owed the honor of being brought before the public in an elaborate memoir to the fact that "he was the representative of a class of men peculiar to Boston, whose deeds or words possess little interest except to members of the charmed circle to which he belonged."

Before resigning ourselves to the conviction of the worthlessness of all that we have heretofore prized among our dearest possessions, let us cast one fond glance upon the Brummagem ware which in our ignorance we took to be genuine.

Beginning with the members of "The Five of Clubs," it is really not surprising that we took them to be men of culture and with some preten-

sion to scholarship. George Ticknor's letters and journals are full of allusions to individuals of the association, which show that he shared the common delusion. For instance, he thus alludes to Hillard in a letter to John Kenyon:—

“ If anybody like Hillard were going to London, I should charge him with an especial commission to see you. But such ambassadors are rare, and I do not send any but the best to old friends like you, for I do not choose to lower the standard by which you measure our countrymen. His book on Italy is more successful than anything of the sort ever printed here. Above five thousand copies have been sold.”

It is not yet ten years since Hillard's death. He was the last survivor of “ The Five of Clubs,” and the

following passages from the notices of his death in different papers will show the estimation in which he was held :

“ The Hon. Robert C. Winthrop now only remains of that eminently gifted coterie of Boston orators in which Edward Everett, Rufus Choate, and George S. Hillard were such brilliant lights. The eloquence of this gifted circle was part of the reputation and the possessions of the community in which they dwelt, conferring an acknowledged preëminence, and making the city the envy of her commercial rivals. Mr. Hillard’s fine poetical conceptions, breadth of culture, and impassioned temperament rendered him a worthy peer of the brightest exemplars of the golden era of Boston eloquence.”

“ He is the purest classical scholar of his generation at the Boston bar,”

was said of him twenty-five years ago by one who knew him well. "He was then the friend of all the friendless in literature and art. Everybody went to him, and nobody went away without being elevated by contact with him."

"He was the most attractive of public speakers. His voice was singularly sweet and melodious. His manner was graceful and pleasing. His diction was polished and elegant. He cultivated the art of oratory, and had few rivals who could compete with him in captivating public audiences."

"He has left a place in this community which there are few to occupy. Among those who will mourn for him with deep and tender affection will be many now successful in various walks of life, whom he took by the hand

when they needed help, encouraged and strengthened when they would otherwise have faltered, and showed them the way by which difficulties were overcome and triumphs were won."

And yet within the last year a well-known popular writer has alluded to Hillard as "a man of much local fame, *now rapidly fading*, who in my youth was considered almost a model orator, acute, well-trained, skilful, and even persuasive;" and he then quotes the remark of a friend after listening to "one of his old, cultured, highly elaborated speeches." "I remember the time when that speech would have seemed to me the perfection of oratory. Now it utterly fails to move me."



VI.

• Professor Felton. — The Im-
possibility of Responding.





VI.

Professor Felton.

I RECALL two occasions in which my recollection of Felton is pleasantly associated with the writings of Irving and Dickens which may here be appropriately cited.

Soon after the publication of the "Tales of the Alhambra," I called, one day at Felton's room, in the second story of Holworthy Hall, at the south-east corner, and found him enjoying the rich feast, which he declared to be equal to anything Irving had previously given us, and, turning to the story of the "Pilgrim of Love," he read aloud the account of the Prince's interviews with the swallow and the

owl, with a keen relish of the delicate satire conveyed in the description of the flippancy of the one and the solemnity of the other; and then of his visit to the venerable old one-eyed raven in the tower, who had been commended to him as a great magician who could by his arts disclose to him the whereabouts of the lovely damsel he was seeking.

If any are left who remember Felton's genial voice, they will respond in their hearts to my vivid recollection of the unctuous tones in which he read the contemptuous reply of the sagacious old bird, and the roar of laughter with which he followed the conclusion, when the raven dismissed the subject as unworthy the attention of a sage, and, turning his single and venerable eye downward, resumed his poring upon the mathematical dia-

gram inscribed upon the pavement of his cell.

The other occasion to which I refer was several years later, but while Felton was still Greek professor. It was one Saturday, when I dined with him and another member of The Five of Clubs at the restaurant then kept by H. D. Parker in the basement at the corner of Court Street and Court Square. This was nearly twenty years before the Parker House was built.

While we were waiting for our dinner, Felton drew a newspaper from his pocket, and asked us if we had seen any of the "Pickwick Papers," which were then appearing from time to time in one of the Boston papers, copied from the English papers as they were irregularly received, for ocean steamers were as yet unknown. The reply from my companion was in

the negative, followed by the inquiry :
“ Who is the author ? ”

“ Nobody knows,” said Felton.
“ He signs himself ‘ Boz,’ which is all
that is yet known of him ; but we have
had no such writer for many a day.”

And then he read to us the sage re-
marks of the elder Weller to his son
on the subject of widows, and again
his contagious laugh pealed forth.

When Dickens afterwards visited
this country in 1842, he became, as is
well known, a warm personal friend of
Felton’s, and I remember with vivid
pleasure the letters of the latter from
New York descriptive of their delight-
ful experiences together there. In an
address to the Massachusetts Histori-
cal Society after the death of Irving,
Felton thus alludes to his recollections
of the two men during that period : —

“ I passed much of the time with

Mr. Irving and Mr. Dickens, and it was delightful to witness the cordial intercourse of the young man, in the flush and glory of his fervent genius, and his elder compeer, in the assured possession of immortal renown. Dickens said in his frank, hearty manner that from childhood he had known the works of Irving, and that before he had thought of coming to this country he had received a letter from him expressing the delight he felt in reading the story of little Nell, and from that time they had shaken hands autographically across the Atlantic."

• The Impossibility of Responding.

With these and a host of similar memories and associations in my mind I trust I may be pardoned for

my inability to respond to such a criticism as the following from Mr. Lathrop:—

“ The lightness and vagueness of theme with which Irving is content is very manifest in ‘ Wolfert’s Roost’ and the ‘ Tales of a Traveller,’ and in ‘ Bracebridge Hall,’ and at times the minute atom of real emotion or definite incident at the bottom of these is almost stifled by his insatiable desire for words. But the most remarkable example is in his treatment of the Rip Van Winkle legend. Irving shows in his sketch of this tradition an excellent sense of what constitutes elegant entertainment; his perception of the gentlemanly in literature is admirable; he contrives good conventional contrasts, and rounds in the whole with a sonorous and well-derived style. It is the most completely

‘polite’ writing. But the absence is as complete of anything like profound insight, deep imaginative sympathy, or genuinely dramatic rendering of character and circumstance. All this finds parallel, too, in his style, which the systematic and loyal puffing of half a century has not been able to make into anything else than a patent-leather Addisonian one.”

How a “patent-leather Addisonian” style can be at the same time a “sonorous and well-derived” one is a conundrum I shall not attempt to solve, but as a sample of the “systematic and loyal puffing” to which Mr. Lathrop alludes, I venture to cite the following from the pen of Mr. George Ripley, who, previous to the appearance of Mr. Lathrop, had ranked as perhaps the ablest and most reliable literary critic the country had produced.

In a review of Irving's "Life of Goldsmith" he thus speaks of the author:—

"There could not be a more admirable description of the influence of his own writings than Mr. Irving has given in his opening paragraph on Goldsmith.

"There are few writers for whom the reader feels such personal kindness as for Oliver Goldsmith, for few have so eminently possessed the magic gift of identifying themselves with their writings. We read his character in every page, and grow into familiar intimacy with him as we read.

"The artless benevolence that beams throughout his works; the whimsical yet amiable views of human life and human nature; the unforced humor, blending so happily with good feeling and good sense, and singularly dashed

at times with a pleasing melancholy; even the very nature of his pleasing and flowing style, all seem to bespeak his moral as well as intellectual qualities, and make us love the man at the same time that we admire the author. While the productions of writers of the loftier pretensions are suffered to moulder on our shelves, those of Goldsmith are cherished and laid in our bosoms. We do not quote them with ostentation, but they mingle with our minds and sweeten our tempers; they put us in good humor with ourselves and the world, and in so doing they make us happier and better men."

The following extract from one of the notices of the fine edition of Irving's works, revised by himself and published by the Putnams, after his return from Spain in 1848, is a further

proof of the lamentable ignorance of the critics of that day:—

“ If any works in our language are worthy of such choice embalming, and such an honored place in all libraries as these are destined to fill, it is those of Washington Irving. Their quaint and exhaustless humor, rich, graceful, and exuberant fancy, and the pure and natural vein of feeling which runs through them make them in an eminent sense household words, always cheering and soothing in their influence, and conveying strengthening and instructive lessons in a form which the mind is always ready to receive. To his writings the words of Sir Philip Sidney may be truly applied: ‘ He cometh to you with a tale that holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner.’ ”



VII.

• Salem. — Nathaniel Hawthorne.
— Salem Men.





VII.

• Salem.

BUT if Mr. Lathrop has exposed the depravity of the literary taste of fifty years ago, it is to Mr. Henry James that we are indebted for enlightening us in regard to the wretched condition of social life before we had been permitted to bask in the broad sunlight of to-day.

To return for a moment to "The Five of Clubs." The statement will not be disputed that its members may be taken as fair representatives of the best culture of the country at the period to which I refer.

They were brilliant men, whose companionship was sought in the

best society of New England, and they were ambitious to seize upon every opportunity to develop their powers by mingling with such society as afforded the best stimulus to intellectual culture. Now it happens to be within my personal knowledge, that among the resources of social enjoyment most highly prized, certainly by three of them, and always responded to with joyful alacrity, was the acceptance of an occasional invitation to visit Salem, where a circle of refined and highly cultivated society then existed, the solid worth and simple, unpretentious character of which comprised such elements of active progress as could nowhere be surpassed.

Mrs. Silsbee's recent charming little book bears testimony to this fact, and were it not for the impropriety of

bringing the names of private families before the public, it would be easy to prove the truth of my assertion from correspondence in my possession. I will make but a single extract from a letter written in later years by one of the "Five," and recurring to this very period :—

" You do not know, and nobody knows, how many of the most joyous and happy recollections of my life are centred in Salem,— recollections, it is true, of a garden whose limits were narrow, but which was green with gladness."

Here follow reminiscences of incidents and people whose influence had left their impress on his character, concluding as follows :—

" In all these the memory of —— mingles, and brightens the picture. Well do I remember the long and

pleasant walks I used to take with him, and the tastes and various ideas I acquired from him.

“ All that I know or care about architecture is owing to the taste that he inspired, and much of my musical taste was formed by his correct and strictly accurate judgment.

“ And what is more than all this, I have before me, in my recollections of him, the model of a truly just and good man.

“ When I think of all the beautiful attributes of his character, I am incited and encouraged to become like him as far as possible. I am taught how immeasurably above wealth and worldly pomp are the humble and truly Christian virtues which adorned his character. His memory is a rich legacy to all who knew him. These recollections of Salem are sacred to

me, and I could spend the day long in recurring to them, but I know you will wish to hear what I am doing."

No one will guess to whom the above beautiful apostrophe refers, and its value is enhanced by the fact that he was not one whose acquirements were exceptional.

He was simply a Salem ship-master with no better education than was then open to all who chose to improve themselves, and he was a fair representative of the social circles of the Salem of that day. The truth is that Salem society was then exceptional, not alone in its refinement and culture, but in its independent thought and progressive spirit.

Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Yet it is precisely at this period that Mr. Henry James takes occasion to bemoan the hard fate of Hawthorne in being doomed to pass his youth in such uncongenial society as that of Salem.

“ His situation,” he says, “ was intrinsically poor; poor with a poverty that one almost hesitates to look into. When we think what the conditions of intellectual life must have been in a small New England town fifty years ago, and when we think of a young man of beautiful genius, with a love of literature and romance, of the picturesque of style and form and color, trying to make a career for himself in the midst of them, compassion for the young man becomes our dominant sentiment.”

The incident which Mr. James selects in evidence of the prevailing lack of culture is certainly remarkable in the proof it affords of his readiness to jump at conclusions from insufficient premises, while overlooking their simplest and most obvious interpretation.

He quotes from Lathrop the account of Hawthorne's first visit to Miss Peabody, — whose youngest sister afterwards became his wife, — forestalling the reader's opinion of the inference he draws from it by the remark that "it has a very simple and innocent air, but to a person not without an impression of the early days of 'culture' in New England, it will be pregnant with historic meaning."

Miss Peabody had invited Hawthorne's sisters — who were her near neighbors — to spend an evening with

her, and to bring their brother, whom she wished to thank for his beautiful tales. "Entirely to her surprise," the invitation was accepted, and "the hostess brought out Flaxman's 'Designs for Dante,' which she had just received from Prof. Felton, and the party made an evening's entertainment of them."

Few readers would think of citing this as an evidence of deficiency or vulgarity of taste. Flaxman was then at the head of his profession in England, and certainly his illustrations of Dante demand a degree of "culture" for their enjoyment considerably beyond mediocrity. Felton knew that in sending them to Salem he was placing them where they would be appreciated and enjoyed.

When Miss Peabody had succeeded, "greatly to her surprise," in drawing

Hawthorne from his seclusion, the fact that instead of spending the evening in idle gossip, the latest works received from a great artist were produced and examined with interest, would be regarded by most people as evidence of some considerable refinement of taste. Perhaps even the eagle eye of Mr. James would have detected nothing more than this, had Mr. Lathrop simply stated that Miss Peabody had just received these designs from Prof. Felton, and she brought them out for the inspection of her guests; and probably he had no intention of conveying any further meaning than such expression would carry. But he happened to use the phrase, "the party made an evening's entertainment of them," and Mr. James, being "a person not without an impression of the early days of culture in New

England," pounced upon the sentence, which in spite of its "simple and innocent air" was "pregnant with historic meaning," and straightway proved from it the wretched shifts for social enjoyment to which people in those days were reduced.

Would it not be prudent for Mr. James to consider the bare possibility that the coming half century may witness such an advance from the culture of the present day, that equal surprise and commiseration may be excited by the thought of devoting an evening to the perusal of the fortunes of *Daisy Miller*?

Mr. James considers it a very remarkable fact that Hawthorne should have become so familiar with the best English writers, as is proved by his charming expressions and the purity of his style. In saying this he uncon-

sciously utters a truth in regard to a circumstance which is of vital importance.

Hawthorne was entirely independent of Salem society, or any other society. In his youth he lived the life of a hermit, and he never entirely emerged from it. It was very rarely that he appeared outside the house in the daytime, and never outside his room if a visitor was in the house. At night he would sally forth on long solitary rambles, digesting and ruminating the intellectual food he had absorbed during the day. His intellectual growth proved the wholesome and nourishing character of the food, which in fact was such as few towns at that day could have provided. "Free libraries" were unknown at that day, but Salem possessed even then a rare treasure in an *Athenæum*, founded on

a very valuable private library, captured *in transitu* by a privateer during the Revolution, and developed by men who appreciated its value, till it comprised all that was essential for the sustenance and vigorous growth of such a mind as Hawthorne's.

He found there the pabulum he needed; and perhaps it was owing to the fact that he digested and assimilated it in the privacy and seclusion of his own apartment, varied only by his solitary rambles at night, that his tales assumed the weird, uncanny spirit that pervades them, which would have been checked, and perhaps wholly dissipated, had it been exposed to the broad light of social conventionalism. It would certainly be wrong to ascribe the development of Hawthorne's powers to his social surroundings, but it is equally so to attempt to

magnify his attainments by disparaging the tone of the society which he scrupulously avoided.

Salem Men.

It would have been more creditable to Mr. James's skill in investigating facts if, instead of sneering at Salem as a community of merchants and ship-masters, who owed their respectability to their wealth, he had reversed his statement, and given what was the simple truth: that Salem had grown rich and attained social eminence by the superior sagacity and intelligence her citizens had exhibited in extending the commerce of the nation by opening trade with all quarters of the globe, at a time when the wars and jealousies of civilized nations rendered it so precarious as

often to demand an intimate knowledge of national law and the exercise of the wisest diplomacy on the part of those who conducted it, and when hitherto unknown sources of wealth were being revealed to the world by Salem men in their voyages of discovery and dealings with savage tribes.

The possession of wealth in those days was in itself the evidence of such intelligence, and such industry and energy in its application, as to constitute a valid claim to respectability; for wealth was not within the reach of mediocrity of intellect, and the "dim twilight of that earlier civilization" had not yet revealed the secrets of stock gambling. Abundant evidence of all I claim for the superior intelligence and executive ability of the Salem men of those days may be found in the archives of

the Essex Institute, while the catalogues of Harvard College will afford equally conclusive testimony of their appreciation of the value of education.

Few, if any, are left who recall the scenes and people of those days with the vivid interest they still retain in my mind.

My own life has not been an uneventful one, and in its course has brought me in contact with varied phases of social experience, including that of intimate relations and correspondence with men and women whose friendship has been the richest blessing this life has brought me, and a reunion with whom comprises a chief feature of attractive interest in my hopes of the future. Of these friends, no purer or nobler examples have come within my ken than those who

individually or collectively have been so sneeringly alluded to by the flippant writers whose words I have quoted.

There is reason to hope that the stage of existence on which they have now entered is not entirely devoid of "some provision for enjoyment;" and if they have proved incapable of appreciating its opportunities, let us trust that consideration will be had of the fact that their course of preparation was concluded before the advent of the lights which have since dawned up on the literary horizon.



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